



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DROWSY DRIVING IS DANGEROUS DRIVING

~ Be alert behind the wheel for yourself and those sharing the road with you ~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – A study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found 37 percent of Americans admitted to falling asleep behind the wheel. Sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness, impairs judgment and increases the risk of crashing.

That is why the Florida Legislature designated the first week of September every year as *Drowsy Driving Prevention Week*. Gov. Scott signed a formal [proclamation](#) this year for the week to run Sept. 1 – 7, which includes the Labor Day holiday. AAA projects 33 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the 2012 holiday weekend and 2.6 percent more Floridians will travel this year.

The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the Florida Department of Transportation are teaming up with lawmakers and safety advocates during the week to get out the message of the dangers of drowsy driving.

“Being alert behind the wheel is critical to highway safety,” said DHSMV Executive Director Julie L. Jones. “Studies show the fatality rate is higher for crashes where a driver falls asleep.”

“It is important for everyone behind the wheel to understand the dangers of drowsy driving,” said FDOT Secretary Ananth Prasad. “Making the decision to pull into a rest area when fatigued can save lives.”

The sponsor of the bill designating the week, Rep. Alan Williams, District 8, said, “Drowsy driving can be just as dangerous as drunk driving. We must do all we can to raise awareness of the dangers of driving drowsy to help save lives.”

Williams sponsored the bill in memory of 8-year-old Ronshay Dugans, who was killed in 2008 when her bus was hit by a driver of a cement truck who fell asleep at the wheel.

Ronshay Dugan’s aunt, Josie West, said she thinks of Ronshay every day and hopes the week prompts people to think about their level of alertness before getting behind the wheel. “Ronshay was gone in an instant when the drowsy truck driver nodded off. His decision to drive while extremely tired tragically took her life.”

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DROWSY DRIVING *(Continued)*

PAGE 2

According to NHTSA, though evidence is limited, since there is no test to quantify levels of sleepiness at a crash site, risks for drowsy driving crashes are:

- Sleep loss
- Driving patterns (driving between midnight and 6 a.m., driving a substantial number of miles each day, driving in the midafternoon and driving for long periods without taking a break)
- Use of sedating medications
- Untreated or unrecognized sleep disorders
- Consumption of alcohol

According to NHTSA, a typical crash related to sleepiness has the following characteristics:

- It occurs during the late night, early morning or afternoon.
- The crash is serious.
- A single vehicle leaves the roadway.
- The crash occurs on a high-speed road.
- The driver does not attempt to avoid the crash.
- The driver is alone in the vehicle.

For more information on drowsy driving, go to www.dot.state.fl.us/safety.

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